Washington State Commission on African American Affairs

Children & Family Services
Outreach Project

Final Report

Submitted by
TAHA & Associates
June 1995

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Acknowledgments

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

During the 1994 legislative session, SHB 2319 was passed. It authorized the establishment of community-based Public and Health Safety Planning Networks throughout the state. Networks were to be comprised of twenty-three fiduciary and non-fiduciary members, appointed by city and county councils, school districts, mayors, county executives and chambers of commerce. This law asked community members, not usually involved in government service, to lead the discussion on children and family services. This law was also designed to ensure that traditionally under-represented groups were involved.

The networks were responsible for developing comprehensive plans to address the problems associated with at-risk youth and families. They were charged with making a measurable impact on:

- juvenile violence
- teen substance abuse
- teen pregnancy and fatherhood
- child abuse
- domestic violence
- drop outs
- youth suicide

Ultimately, the plans and decisions set forth by the Public and Health Safety networks would influence the allocation of state funds.

The Washington State Commission on African American Affairs supported this effort in fostering local decision-making in social and health planning.

Starting in June 1994, community volunteers and service delivery agents worked, throughout the state, to define network boundaries and to recruit candidates for appointment to network boards. Generally speaking, network recruitment efforts received little attention, in spite of the efforts of local organizers. One of

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the consequences was that ethnic community members were under-represented in many organizing processes.

The legislative intent was clear about the need to include diverse communities and develop priorities and plans which reflected the diverse interests in a community. According to Sec.109.2.a of the enabling legislation, " ... the membership of the (Public & Health Safety Networks) shall be culturally diverse and adequately reflect the racial and cultural composition of the community."

The Commission on African American Affairs was concerned that the voice of the African American community not be lost in what was becoming a complex planning process.

Project Purposes & Goals

In the Winter of 1994, the Commission, working with the Washington State Family Policy Council, launched a state-wide outreach project designed to complement the efforts of local Public & Health Safety Networks. The goals of this outreach project were several:

- To encourage the appointment of African Americans to local networks;

- To encourage the participation of the African American community in network planning processes; and,

- To help link African American community members and groups with network and planning officials.

Project timelines precluded the Commission's working with each of the 53 networks established around the state. Consequently, the Commission focused on those geographic areas with significant African American populations. The following fifteen networks were targeted:

- Spokane
- Thurston
- Yakima
- Benton & Franklin
- Kitsap
- Tacoma & Greater Pierce
- King County (7)

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TAHA & Associates, a Washington State planning and public involvement firm, were hired in December to implement and coordinate the Commission's outreach project.

• Project Background & Rationale

The Washington State Commission on African American Affairs is a nine-member board, appointed by the Governor. They are responsible for advising the Governor and the legislature on issues of importance to the African American community.

Since its inception, the Commission has analyzed and developed policy and legislative recommendations on a wide range of issues affecting African Americans throughout the state. Many of these issues concerned at-risk children and families. Because of this work, the Commission recognized the significant impact that network planning processes could have on African American children and families.

In Washington State, African Americans represent approximately 3% of the population and 4% of the state's youth population. A brief examination of statewide indicators, illustrates that African American families and children are at-risk at a level disproportionate to their representation in the population:

- **Domestic violence is a part of too many relationships.**
  30% of the families in domestic violence shelters in King County are African American.[1]

- **Our adult men and women are over represented in the prison and jail populations.**
  African American men represent 19.6% of the state's male inmate population, 24.0% of the state's female inmate population and 13% of the total population in active community corrections.[2]

- **Our infants are more likely to die at birth.**
  African American and Native American infants are more than twice as likely to die as white infants.[3]

- **More and more black children live in poverty.**
  Between 1980 and 1990, the percent of black children in poverty increased from 24.7% to 29.6%. The percentage

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of black children in poverty is two and a half times greater than the percentage of white children.[4]

- *Too many of our babies are having babies.*
  Birthrates among African Americans are three times those for white teens.[5]

- *Too many of our youth are incarcerated.*
  17% of the juveniles detained or under court supervision are African American.[6]

- *Student educational achievement is poor.*
  The median scores for African American students, on state-wide standardized tests, are 20% below the national average.[7]

- *Too many of our youth drop out.*
  In 1991-92, 13.6% of our youth enrolled in public schools dropped-out. This drop out rate is more than twice as high as the rate for white children.[8]

- *Few of our youth go on to higher education.*
  In 1989, our students represented 2.1% of the total graduate and undergraduate enrollment in public and private institutions.[9]

Given the many risks faced by African American families and children, the Commission believed that ethnic participation in network planning processes was critical to the development of effective service delivery plans and strategies.

If Public and Health Safety Networks are to develop strategies which will be successful, affected communities need to participate. If traditional outreach strategies do not work then extraordinary measures are warranted.

As a result, the Commission decided that the best way to ensure ethnic community participation was to lend its reputation, stature and expertise and to provide direct technical assistance to the networks.

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Project Strategies

To achieve our community outreach goals and help local networks, the Commission developed a three part strategy which:

- **Assisted Networks in Recruiting African American Candidates**
  We worked directly with network organizers to help them identify and recruit African American representatives for appointment to network boards. Our knowledge of ethnic communities, throughout the state, and our state-wide mailing list proved invaluable to many local organizers. In targeted networks, twenty-six African Americans have been appointed to the boards and five African Americans serve as network Chairs and Vice Chairs.

- **Sponsored Seven Strategy and Seven Outreach Meetings**
  We worked directly with the African American network board members to structure a community outreach process which was specific to each geographic area. Over seven statewide strategy meetings culminated in seven community outreach meetings. We used direct mail, the ethnic press and community groups to publicize our meetings. Flyers and announcements were sent to over 2,000 individuals. That act alone served to increase community awareness of the networks and their purposes.

- **Helped Networks Assess African American Issues and Concerns**
  Our seven community meetings captured the issues and concerns of over 160 active people around the state. As a result of this effort, local planning networks will gain a perspective on the concerns of African Americans and can integrate what they have learned into decision-making processes.

Project Findings

The results of our outreach process are documented in this report. Those who are looking for a specific panacea or to "unfund" specific programs and services, will probably be disappointed. The concerns and ideas expressed in this report are conceptual and value-laden. They serve well as a yardstick

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which local networks and state agencies can employ to assure that services are responsive to community needs.

This is not to say that our findings do not include praise and criticism for specific services. It abounds throughout our report and many services and agencies receive both praise and criticism.

It appears, however, that the African American community is equally concerned about the <u>way services are delivered</u> as they are about <u>what services are delivered.</u>

The recommendations made by community participants were directed at many audiences:

- **The Family Policy Council and the State** were urged to revise network appointment processes which made it difficult for unaligned residents to compete and made it even more difficult for youth and young adults to contribute and be recognized.

- **Networks** were advised to frame service delivery options and funding criteria to reinforce families and parents, to develop service delivery systems which were truly responsive to diverse communities and clients, and to extend the types and quality of activities available to youth.

- **The African American community** was urged to unite in support of one another, to embrace our tradition of strong family values and to actively contribute to the well-being, development and esteem of our youth.

Next Steps

The information and recommendations presented in this report will be shared with local networks, the community-at-large, the other ethnic commissions and the Family Policy Council. It documents the thinking, state-wide, of key members of the African American community on how to approach the problems of at-risk families and children.

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It is the Commission's hope that this report will form the basis for a continuing dialogue between and among network members and the African American community. The outreach process which we launched is a beginning and not an end.

Over the next month the Commission will also develop an advocacy agenda which will address some of the issues identified by our community.

We believe there are a number of ways to help state agencies work more effectively with their African American customers and clients. While many issues will require new or realigned resources, we believe that progress can be made in some areas without significant funding increases.

Our advocacy agenda will seek to define these opportunities. We will share our conclusions and incorporate them into this final report.

Structure of this Report

Part One of this report summarizes the issues, priorities and concerns raised at our community meetings. Part Two contains the recommendations generated at each community meeting. Attached to this report are samples of the tools we used during project implementation, including our press releases, a copy of the community meeting agenda/questions and a copy of the announcement flyer.

Reference Notes

1   King County United Way, Community Needs Assessment, 1994
2   WA. State Commission on African American Affairs, A Comparative Statistical Analysis, 1990
3   WA. State Public Health Report, 1994
4   The State of Washington's Children, University of WA., 1994
5   WA. State Public Health Report, 1994
6   Governor's Juvenile Justice Report, 1994
7   The State of Washington's Children, University of WA., 1994
8   WA. State Office of Public Instruction, Dropout Rates and Graduation Statistics, 1991-1992
9   WA. State Commission on African American Affairs, A Comparative Statistical Analysis, 1990

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PART ONE

An Overview of Community Priorities & Concerns

An Overview of State-wide Priorities & Concerns

While each outreach meeting had its own tone and focus, there were several issues which were common to all and given high priority by all.

African American Recommendations to Local Networks

- **Education** was considered fundamental to promoting safe and healthy families. Across the state, participants talked about the failure of the educational system to support African American children, with respect to skill development, expectation levels and self-esteem. This was seen as both a curriculum and a staffing problem.

  Participants pointed directly to the lack of diversity among teaching and administrative staff as areas requiring attention. They also spoke at length about the need to redirect existing curricula to accurately display the accomplishments and contributions of Africans and African Americans. They also indicated that our community may have entrusted our children to the educational system but that parents must assume a stronger advocacy role to assure the system performs on our behalf.

- **Cultural Relevancy** was a broad theme raised at each meeting. Participants were very concerned about the lack of culturally sensitive social services and resources available to African American families and children. This was as much a concern for participants who lived in resource-rich urban communities as those who live in suburban or remote communities.

  Considerable literature exists documenting that effective social service strategies must recognize cultural differences and be anchored in the values, traditions and cultural norms of the customer/client. The same strategies do not work for all communities. Culturally sensitive and culturally representative staff are critical to this equation. If local planning networks are to develop programs which will make a "measurable" difference in at-risk indicators, they need to address issues of cultural sensitivity and representation in the service delivery mix.

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- **Reinforcing Parents and the Family Structure** was another theme common to all. Participants across the state indicated that many institutional policies and practices do not support and reinforce the authority and integrity of the family. This challenge was extended to the social welfare system, juvenile and criminal justice systems, the media, educational systems, community development/ job development agencies and the Black church.

  Many believed parental authority has been undermined, parents have not been helped to develop effective parenting skills and they have been denied opportunity to acquire the resources needed to preserve the family structure. Participants were extremely concerned that the values and principles traditional to strong Black families have been undermined. Network efforts to address at-risk populations should be carefully constructed to assure that families are preserved as they face the many crises and stress points associated with managing at-risk children. Networks were also urged to help parents by making parenting education and skill development a priority.

- **There was overwhelming support for more activities and services which challenge and engage youth.** Participants uniformly agreed that there were simply not enough activities of substance and that young people were bored.

African American Recommendations to the Family Policy Council

In addition to identifying community priorities and recommending specific action steps, community residents raised a number of issues which have implications for the overall structure and decision-making process associated with local networks. Specifically,

- **Network appointment processes were challenged.** In some communities, people were concerned about the level of African American representation on the networks; one person in twenty-three was considered insufficient. Other communities strongly recommended that established African American agencies should be among those charged with

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appointment authority. Still others noted that the appointment process, and the designation of traditional agencies as appointment authorities, severely disadvantaged grass roots participation and the involvement of non-aligned community leadership. Statewide, African Americans recommended that appointment processes be reviewed and amended.

- **The lack of young people and young adults involved in the networks was also an issue.** Community representatives noted that young people are closer to the problems and represent the future leadership of our communities. Community representatives recognized that a young person's vision of what's been effective and ineffective may differ from adults.

  Many believed that the extremely low representation of juveniles and young adults in network planning processes will result in the reinforcement of status-quo solutions to problems which have exceeded traditional solutions. They indicated that African American youth must enter into dialogue with adults, be listened to and be part of developing solutions.

- **Community representatives raised questions about the priorities which the networks are charged with addressing.** Essentially, participants believed that network planning processes should focus more on prevention and younger populations. Many simply recommended that the community should cast the boundaries of this planning process.

  For example, one community indicated that out-of-home placements is an issue for the African American community yet the State decided that this would not be addressed by the networks. Other groups placed considerable emphasis on economic development and the role of the business community in addressing the problems of at-risk youth. Again, these are areas tangential to current network processes.

We hope that the Family Policy Council and legislators will look at housekeeping changes, in the next legislative session, which will address some of the concerns which have been raised about structure.

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Community Recommendations to One Another

Our community representatives also offered considerable guidance to the African American community at large. People very definitely recognized that the future and health of our families and children is the responsibility of all members of the African American community and all groups and organizations who purport to represent the interests of African Americans. Specifically,

- Community leaders need to be held accountable.

- Our churches need to be more aggressive in addressing the needs of youth, supporting working parents and reinforcing family values.

- Our elders need to develop and make way for younger leadership.

- We need to return to traditional values and embrace our history.

- We need to network and support one another.

- We need to, showcase successful, professional and non-professional role models and promote strong male role models, particularly fathers and husbands.

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PART TWO

Community Meeting Summaries

May 18, 1995
Yakima
Southeast Community Center
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Facilitator: Kwami Taha
Commissioner: Henry Beauchamp
Network member: Audrey Fetters

Number of Participants: 15

Note: At the beginning of the meeting, community residents raised a number of issues concerning the process used to appoint only one African American to the Yakima County Public and Health Safety Network. The first hour was spent discussing this issue. The specific concerns which were raised included the following:

- The announcement process bypassed the African American community. The process relied primarily on the Yakima Chamber of Commerce mailing list. Community based newspapers, African American organizations and the community were unaware of the formation of the network or the opportunity to compete for the network board until informed by the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs. Also, the appointment process does not make room for minority agencies and groups to nominate network members. Participants welcomed the appointment made, by the Juvenile Court, of an African American to the board.

- Attendees felt that one African American appointee to a network board of 23 is insufficient to effectively represent the needs and concerns of the African American community. While acknowledging that there were a little over 3,000 African Americans living in Yakima County, the disproportionate number of African American youth who are in detention, group homes, and academic underachievers, warrants at least one or two other network appointments. This could ensure that the interests of the community would be fully represented.

- Community representatives also took issue with the goals and priorities targeted for network planning; they believed that

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communities should have the opportunity to establish their own goals and priorities. Attendees were concerned that there was insufficient emphasis on African American children, youth and prevention strategies.

1. What are the key elements of our vision for safe and healthy families?

There were several common themes which emerged from the small group discussions.

Strong Parents & Families - Active parenting and strong parental role models were important elements of this communities vision. Children were safe and always found themselves with a relative or an adult. Their parents had a clear understanding of their role, they were skilled in parenting and modeled effective communication skills. Parents were advocates on behalf of their children in all systems with affected their lives; they were actively involved in school, sports and other youth activities.

Parents Can Provide the Basics - Parents were afforded the opportunity to provide for their children. Parents were educated and skilled; they were employed; they knew how to effectively manage their resources; and could take care of the basic needs of their children. Affordable and accessible health care was important to this vision.

Lots of Resources for Youth - This vision also included lots of resources and activities which engaged youth and children i.e. culturally sensitive mentoring programs, skills and job training. All community members worked to actively support our children. Those youth who were in need had resources such as safe havens, transitional and half-way housing to turn to.

Little Government Intervention in Family Affairs - The final part of this vision reduced government intervention in the lives of families. DSHS and Child Protective Services were observed to have too much power.

2. What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and polices have been most effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?

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One work group was very specific in identifying agencies and programs that were effective. They mentioned the following:

- Headstart
- OIC
- Latchkey programs
- Parenting programs
- Yakima County Substance Abuse Coalition
- Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts
- Community Centers

- FFA-Future Farmers of America
- Programs with culturally diverse staff
- Churches
- WIC-Prenatal care
- Some welfare programs
- Boys and Girls Club

The second group spoke more broadly about behaviors and activities:

Behaviors
- Supporting Afro-American businesses
- Supporting each other
- Pride in our community
- Respect-Elders/Adults/Children
- Respect-Afro American Culture-All levels

Activities
- Financial base for families in the past were effective
- Entrepreneur/Enterprises-Small Business
- Communication Links and Information

3. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors, and policies have been least effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

Specific programs and agencies which were identified as least effective were:

- The Juvenile Justice system
- The Criminal Justice system
- The Chamber of Commerce

Apprenticeship programs were also criticized for not working closely with children of color. All programs and services , especially schools, were deemed ineffective to the extent they were not culturally relevant or did not employ culturally diverse staff.

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Behaviors and attitudes which were identified as ineffective
include:

- We don't trust each other
- We don't respect other's skills/knowledge
- The poor acceptance of new people to the community
- We don't value education and life long learning
- We don't nurture our own i.e. family, friends
- We don't publicly celebrate the accomplishments of
  African American youth and adults
- We don't always utilize the human resources in the
  community; class-caste-credentials can get in the way.

Other issues deemed ineffective were:

- The lack of social outlets for youth/adults/families
- The lack of professional/non-professional role models
- The lack of community understanding and knowledge
  about the roles-responsibilities of others

4. **Identify three action priorities for creating safe and
   healthy families?**

The following action priorities were identified:

1. Integrate community-based work forces which are all
   white.
2. Develop a fully supported, valley-wide summer and
   year-round Jobs Program for youth and adults.
3. Develop literacy/education programs for youth and
   adults.
4. Create an economic development plan which includes
   training/education and financial backing.
5. Develop a "safe house" for youth.
6. Develop a "Follow Up" strategy for all actions taken.
7. Expand mentorship programs for African Americans.
8. Create a system for youth support in and out of the
   justice system.
9. Maintain the Affirmative Action program.

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May 19, 1995
Pierce
Evergreen College, Tacoma Campus
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Facilitators: Shani Taha, Kwami Taha
Commissioners: Tony Hudson, Shaunna Weatherby
Commission Staff: James Kelly
Network Members: Johnny Washington, Bianca Colter, Janice
                                  Poole, Bobbie Simpson
Participants: 34

Note: In Pierce County there are two networks. In order to assure
that the issues and concerns, identified via this process, reflected
each network's population base and to assess if there were
different perspectives based on geography or age, we formed
four groups. Two groups consisted of Tacoma residents, one
consisted of greater Pierce County residents and the third was a
young adult group with participants who were under 35 years of
age. The recommendations of each group are reported
separately so that distinctions and differences are preserved.

1. **What are the key elements of our vision for safe and
    healthy families?**

•   *Tacoma*

Our two Tacoma groups articulated a vision which included many
components:

Trust is a critical aspect of creating an environment which fosters
personal growth and safe and healthy families. Our Tacoma
groups defined trust in terms of parent-child relationships and
institutional-family-community relationships.

The family structure is supported - Both groups spoke to the
need for every element of the community to reinforce and support
the family structure so that a broad extended family is formed
which includes community leaders, churches, Big brothers and
sisters, boys & girls clubs, inviting & comfortable schools, parks
and safe recreational tools. The development of role models and
community networking were also considered important.

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The **business community** was an integral part of this vision, providing jobs, mentors, apprenticeships and a positive local presence.

Education is community-driven. The educational community exercises leadership. Training on parenting skills and new parenting methods is available throughout the community.

Police are part of the community. They participate in block parties and work to foster positive community relations so that neighborhood streets are safe.

Health care is accessible. Well-care is encouraged and the overall population is better educated and more aware of the importance of heath care.

- *Greater Pierce County*

Strong families and actively involved parents were a major part of this groups vision. Leadership roles in the household were reinforced. Household members worked in agreement with one another. Expectations were clear, communications were effective, solid work skills prevailed and children had self esteem. Health care and nutrition practices were evident and parents served as positive role models for their children's behaviors and actions. There were extensive activities for children and families to do.

- *Young Adults & Youth*

Our young adult vision indicated that accessible and affordable **health** care is critical. Access to **education which is culturally relevant** and helps to instill and reinforce community and **family values and morals**. Community **mentoring and role models** was considered important as was the availability of **parent education** and evening/ week end **training for students**.

2. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been most effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

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- *Tacoma*

Our two Tacoma discussion groups identified a number of specific programs and services which they viewed as being effective:

- Safe Streets
- Planned Parenthood
- Evergreen State College
- Community Health clinics
- Drug & alcohol programs
- Summer youth employment
- Urban League programs
- EOP programs
- DARE
- Boys & Girls clubs
- Health department
- YMCA/YWCA

- *Greater Pierce County*

This group identified a number of broad service delivery concepts and approaches as being particularly effective:

- Networking
- Teaching our children African American history & culture
- Programs or agencies which provide a forum for African Americans to interact and communicate on "our" issues
- Successful African American role models
- Programs and agencies that "give back" to the community
- Business development and on-the-job training for youth and adults

- *Young Adults & Youth*

Our young adult group identified the following services and practices as being effective:

- Spiritual organizations
- The neighborhood
- NAACP
- Positive, value-oriented leadership selected by the community
- Community involvement in processes for solving community issues

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3. What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been least effective/successful?

Our Tacoma groups identified the following as being least effective:

- The run-away hot line
- Safe streets
- The Health department
- DSHS - employee attitudes & behavior
- The Dept. of Corrections
- Short Term Child protective services
- The Juvenile Justice system i.e. Ramon Hall
- Education systems which lack of cultural sensitivity
- DSHS services which lack of cultural sensitivity
- Latch key programs

The primary reason that many of these services were considered ineffective had to do with the lack of cultural sensitivity exhibited by these agencies and programs. Participants spoke to culturally inadequate educational curriculum , the lack of social work professionals servicing Pierce County from DSHS and poor attitudes about blacks that lead to unfair treatment.

Ineffective values and practices included: a slave mentality and religious oppression.

• *Greater Pierce County*

This group identified four ineffective practices and behaviors:

- Laws that do not support parents and reduce parental authority i.e. the runaway law
- Parents who do not enforce family values
- Poor/inadequate communication to the African American community
- People unwilling to back their words with action

• *Young Adults & Youth*

Our young adults identified four ineffective practices and programs: poor media reporting and no reporting or emphasis on positive community activities and people; welfare programs which do not help people break the cycle; DARE; and the lack of community control over resources.

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4. **Identify three action priorities for creating safe and healthy families?**

* *Tacoma*

Our Tacoma groups identified the following action areas:

Education
Programs which will improve parent/ teacher relations, better communication, increase parental involvement and develop strong & effective PTA's. Teacher re-education was called for and the Portland model for developing culturally sensitivity was recommended. The inclusion of African American history and accomplishments in school curricula was critical.

Health
Developing smoke free, stress free environments; providing for well child care; indigent care; affordable care; long term care; and mental health care.

Family Structure
Parenting classes, neighborhood networks and better youth programs were recommended.

Education reform was given priority. Educational systems should include culturally sensitive curricula and staff, should do a better job of skill development to include financial planning classes. Parenting education should be widely available.

Family Support Programs which provide families with professional and personal support to address social/cultural needs.

Creating a **Network of mentors** to support and help follow-through with youth was also recommended.

* *Greater Pierce County*

This group recommended four action items:

* Developing and African American Learning Center which would provide a central place for the community to network, learn and positively interact as youth and adults.

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- Mobilize the church to play a more aggressive role, to outreach to families and children and support/help those at-risk.

- Develop strong male African American role models willing to work directly with children.

- Increase the availability of apprenticeship programs for youth.

- **Young Adults & Youth**

Our young adults recommended:

- Mentoring & networking programs
- Efforts to culturally infuse the educational system
- Regular forums in the African American community so that we can interact and deal with today's and tomorrow's issues and opportunities

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May 24, 1995
Thurston
New Hope Baptist Church
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Facilitator: Shani Taha
Commissioner: Thelma Jackson
Network Member: Christina Johnson

Participants: 7 children under 15 years of age and 1 adult

Note: We were surprised and delighted when the church's youth group asked to meet with us. We adjusted the format of the meeting to focus on problems and solutions. The results of this discussion are summarized below.

The one adult who came to the meeting, stayed throughout and at the end of our meeting informally spoke about her interests. She was the mother of two children, one teen and a pre-teen. She was a working, single parent and indicated that she was afraid for her children. She said she was looking for answers, support and ways to keep her children involved and active. We encouraged her participation in network planning processes and helped her link with individuals and groups which could reinforce her goals for her children.

About our youth
We spent some time, at the beginning of the meeting, finding out about each young person who participated in this meeting. Among the seven, one was 15, one was 12 and the remainder were 13 and 14 years of age. Three were girls and the remainder were boys. Interestingly enough, none were born in the area. Three were from California, one was from New York, one from "the South", one was from Texas and one was from Louisiana. All indicated their parents had moved here to provide them with a safer environment.

When asked about their future plans: one wanted to attend college but was uncertain about his career goal; one wanted to be a beautician; two wanted to be a nurses; one wanted to be a businessman and one wanted to be a computer technician. All were very energetic and very talkative.

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1. **What problems from our network list have you or your friends experienced or encountered.**

   We spent a good deal of time talking about the problems and pressures they see among their friends and in the community. Our young people indicated:

   - **Drugs** is the biggest problem, Most high schools have smoker's pits and youth smoke weed during lunch time and after school. One young person indicated, "Everyone knows we smoke but they don't care."

   - **Youth violence** is also a problem. Every neighborhood and every school has gang activity. They indicated that gangs don't bother kids who don't want to be involved; they fight with each other. Several young people indicated that schools which took a hard-line were most successful in dealing with gangs. Timberline was mentioned as an example. This school expels youth and doesn't allow gang symbols like "rags and colors".

   - This group didn't have a lot of experience with **teen pregnancy** and parenting. They indicated, however, that it was a way for young people to get attention and love. They said some girls who become pregnant are also abused. Most felt the girls were to blame for teen pregnancy because they "let the boys take advantage of them".

   - **Lack of things to do** was considered a major problem. They observed there is no place to go to meet other African American youth in Thurston County and the bus system was poor. One young person said that they needed a YMCA Youth Center like the one in Pierce County. Neighborhood teams and sports were also considered important.

2. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been least effective/successful?**

   We generated quite a response when we asked about the effectiveness of the DARE program. Our youth indicated it was a boring program with the same information presented

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each year. They indicated the presenters/officers often spoke down to young people and didn't engage them in "real world" discussions. They effectively told us the DARE program was an adult panacea...it may make adults feel like they're doing something but it doesn't work from a young person's perspective.

3. **What is the most important thing we could do to help young people in this community?**

Our young people recommended that a major goal of the network should be to support programs and services which reinforced youth interaction and cultural identity by promoting culturally-specific activities. Specific examples of programs and services included the African American Drum Club, black mentors, more black teachers, black history, youth retreats and teen centers.

They also indicated that transportation needed to be improved so that young people could get to movies, malls, their friends homes, teen centers, etc.

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May 25, 1995
King County
Garfield Community Center
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Facilitator: Shani Taha
Commissioner: TJ Vassar
Commission Staff: James Kelly
Network Members: Alex Stephens, Robert Stephens, Walter
Backstrom

Participants: 19

Note: In Seattle-King County there are seven networks. In order
to assure that the issues and concerns identified via this process
reflected each network's population base and to assess if there
different perspectives based on geography and age, we formed
three groups. One consisted of Seattle residents, one consisted
of greater King County residents and the third was a young adult
group with participants who were under 35 years of age. The
recommendations of each group are reported separately so that
distinctions are preserved.

1. **What are the key elements of our vision for safe and
   healthy families?**

Our **Seattle** group identified the following as part of their vision:

- A holistic, not fragmented, approach to services which
  include housing, mental illness & family problems
- Stable housing
- Adequate income and full employment
- Education that prepares people for a role in society
- Welfare regulations should allow purchase of basic
  items i.e. soap and help people break the cycle
- Values from religion or a respect for different cultures
- Traditions to pass on
- Church has a spiritual and educational role to promote
  families

Our **greater King County** group identified the following elements
as critical to their vision:

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- Safe streets
- Economic empowerment & jobs
- Access to current information
- Promotion of fatherhood & parenting
- Spirituality and values
- Effective education
- Health care
- Housing
- Extended families
- Enhanced access to inner city services
- Confidence in and access to government
- Community based crime prevention programs

Our **young adult and youth** group authored a vision statement. That vision statement called for:

> *A stable foundation that allows (for) the growth and self-affirmation of our children, our families and our community.*

2. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been most effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

Our **Seattle** group identified the following services as being most effective:
- Employment
- Head start parenting programs
- WIC program
- Housing programs which encourage home ownership
- Policies which encourage the development of black communities by putting resources in the community i.e. schools, libraries, government buildings
- Commissions which address the needs of ethnic people e.g. Human Rights & the Commission on African American Affairs

Our **greater King County** group indicated the following services were effective:
- Home-based services
- Church programs including youth programs

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- Programs that recognize and honor positive behaviors
- Early intervention
- Self-help

This group also spoke about effective attitudes indicating that <u>taking responsibility for our own actions</u> was important.

The **young adult and youth** group identified the following as being most effective:

- Cultural Education programs such as ROPE (Rights of Passage Experiences)
- Cultural awareness training in the workplace
- Community Centers for younger person
- Economic development
- Younger people getting involved & taking leadership
- Networking & pooling resources

This group also identified several behaviors as being important and effective - listening with an open mind and acquiring knowledge of self.

3. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been least effective/successful?**

The **Seattle** group indicated:

- Detention and incarceration policies
- Culturally insensitive education policies
- Political agendas which do not place importance on equality of opportunity
- Failure of determinant sentencing...judges should be allowed to design creative options
- Culturally insensitive service providers..there is a problem finding culturally relevant service
- Encourage the development of the Black community
- Community policing in which the police are sensitive to the communities served

The **greater King County** group said the following were least effective:

- Self-defeating attitudes
- Gangster rap music

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- The "vicious cycle" practices of the welfare system
- Ineffective educational practices that graduate youth who can't read
- Attitudes and resources that exclude consideration of African Americans
- The criminal & juvenile justice system

Our group of **young adults and youth** indicated the following:

- Ability to discipline children has been taken out of the hands of parents
- Not knowing a sense of self or community....how did we come to this basic state
- Lack of information
- Not aware of agency and commission roles & function e.g. Fred Hutch & AA Commission
- No outreach
- Apathy
- Lack of accountability

4. Identify three action priorities for creating safe and healthy families?

Seattle priorities were:

- Recruit youth to police themselves ....respect, reverence & reflection are the themes to be followed

- Train parents on how to be effective advocates for their children ...i.e. and make the school district work for them

- Develop a business & entrepreneurial base in schools to teach youth

- Empower parents to provide support & guidance...more parenting classes

- Develop conflict resolution teams in schools with the idea of reducing the disproportionate number of black children who are suspended.

Greater King County had the following action items:

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- Reinforce spirituality & values
- Take political action
- Support economic empowerment/jobs

Our **young adult and youth** group identified the following priorities:

- Cultural awareness programs
- Dissemination of information to a wide audience
- Providing parental figures with help in fulfilling their roles
- Voter registration & education
- Holding leaders accountable

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May 30, 1995
Kitsap
Jane Ruhley Community Center
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Facilitator: Kwami Taha
Commissioner: Leroy Williams
Commission staff: James Kelly
Network members: Paulette Graham

Participants: 14

Note: At the start of the meeting, community participants raised the question regarding the lack of effort to inform the broader African American community of Kitsap County/Bremerton of the formation of and the process involved in the public and health community network. Approximately forty minutes was spent discussing this issue. The specific concerns which were raised include the following:

- The community network process bypassed the community and sought-out only one, traditional, Bremerton African American organization, relying mostly on them to recommend candidates.

- While the community network originally had four African American appointees, two have recently resigned and not been replaced. The chairperson, who is an African American , was applauded because she is very responsive to the concerns and needs of the community.

- A lot of concern was also expressed about the lack of African American youth representation.

The attendees discussed how they could participate in the network planning and implementation process in order to ensure that the community's priorities and goals are met.

1. **What are the key elements of our vision for safe and healthy families?**

Both groups identified the following elements:

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Education: Working with public schools to set real academic expectations for African American students; Making the schools a greater part of the community ; and establish a system by which to inform/educate the community on how to access resources and take advantage of opportunities; Strong community outreach/ support groups.

Economics: Development of local small businesses which would provide employment opportunities for African American youth and adults; Find ways to attract African American professionals into the community, e.g. doctors, dentists, etc.

Religion: Religious organizations must become more pro-active in assisting the community to solve its problems; they must become a more determined advocate of family, social and human values, while fostering a greater community spirituality.

Healthy Community Environment: Safe streets for children, elderly and citizens; better living conditions e.g. affordable and moderate housing and in-family/community placement of children instead of foster care.

Health Needs: Local health clinics and hospitals facilities; alcoholic and drug treatment programs; pre-natal care, teen pregnancy intervention and immunization.

Recreation: Organized social and athletic activities; Parks and community centers with goal-oriented enrichment programs that will address the boredom that youth and young adults are experiencing.

Effective Parenting Skills: Communications, teaching and discipline methods; involvement of loving and caring parents, grandparents and role models to assist parents in need of help; custodial and non-custodial fathers to take more responsibility.

Leadership: African American leaders must become less passive and status quo-oriented in their articulation of the needs and interests of the community. We need more visionary, solution-oriented leaders who are less distanced from the community.

Youth: Must be heard and play a significant role in the community development process.

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2. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and polices have been most effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

The Kitsap community identified a large number of effective programs and services:

Community centers, religious institutions, family /neighborhood functions, evening activities/programs and 4-H were among the services and programs considered the most successful.

The following specific services were recognized:

- Effective Black Parenting
- Safe Streets
- Girls Scout (Westpark),
- MLTH (AAU)
- Children Safety Watch III
- Dare
- YMCA
- Project Family
- Blacks in Government
- Kitsap Youth Services
- Kitsap Mental Health Services
- Power and African American Music Board

The following services were also identified on a broad I basis: health care, alcohol and drug treatment programs and youth care.

3. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors, and policies have been least effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

Two major themes were, however, evident as this community addressed the issues of activities, behaviors and services which are least effective. Lack of participation African American professionals in community affairs and lack of coordination of community resources/services and youth employment were dominant themes.

Least effective practices -
- Multiple out of home placements
- Separation of siblings/extending members
- Slow placements
- Social service agencies' cultural insensitivity

Least effective behaviors/attitudes -
- Denial of discrimination in community

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- Lack of participation of the Black Community/Black Professionals
- Separation of the military and civilian communities

Least effective programs -
- Sex Education
- Planned Parenthood
- Social Services- Case Worker Association

4. Identify three action priorities for creating safe and healthy families?

The Kitsap community identified the following action items:

1. Youth Employment
2. More Before/After School Programs
3. More Structured Family Outreach Programs
4. Support group for families and our environment
5. Education , Awareness, and Networking
6. Reassessing values(e.g. respect, attitudes, dress, morale, motivation, ethics, standards)

The following were also identified as important action items:

- One Church-one family
- Not separating families/extended family
- African American Resources (professionals and entrepreneurs involvement)
- Resource system /Network
- Put African Americans in key positions (relating to programs offered)
- Community/School Partnerships
- Safe haven for legal issues
- Religion (Spirituality)
- Drug free environments
- Parents and adults set examples for youth
- Practice two-parent households

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May 31, 1995
Spokane
Southeast Spokane Community Center
7 p.m. - 9 p.m.

Facilitator: Shani Taha
Commissioner: Jennifer Roseman
Commission Staff: James Kelly
Network Members: Linda Urquhart (Chair), Al Hill, Sarah
Hay (youth member)

Number of Participants: 53

Note: At the beginning of the meeting, community residents
raised a number of issues concerning the process used to
appoint individuals to the Spokane County Public and Health
Safety Network. Nearly an hour and a half was spent discussing
this issue. The specific concerns which were raised include the
following:

- The announcement process relied on the United Way mailing
  list, did not employ community-based organizations and
  consequently many people in the African American
  community were unaware of the opportunity to compete for
  network appointments;

- The appointment process has reinstalled many of the
  same/existing funding and decision-making agents which is
  inconsistent with legislative intent and will reinforce old
  relationships and solutions;

- The appointment process does not make room for minority
  agencies and groups to nominate network members;

- The appointment process is very difficult for unaligned or
  grass roots community residents to penetrate and assume
  leadership;

- African Americans are seriously underrepresented. One
  appointment among 23 is insufficient to effectively represent
  the needs and concerns of the African American community;

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- African American youth, in particular, and all youth, in general, are also under-represented.

- Community representatives also took issue with the targets and priorities targeted for network planning; they believed that communities should have the opportunity to establish their own goals. Community representatives were concerned that their was insufficient emphasis on children and prevention strategies.

Community residents were extremely concerned about the apparent biases built into the representation process. Many people clearly indicated they could not trust or support a planning process, a plan and funding decisions in which they were so poorly represented. The majority believed that immediate action should be taken to remedy the situation. Some of the recommendations made and agreements reached include the following:

- The number of network representatives should be expanded to allow for appointing another five community representatives;

- The current African American network member agreed to meet on a monthly or bi-monthly basis with members of the community;

- The one student appointed to the network agreed to bring together students to work with her. Ethnic students would be included.

- The network Chair agreed to discuss with network members the need to change the meeting time from 4-6 to the evening so that community residents can participate; community residents indicated they were interested in participating in the administrative as well as the planning and funding decisions of the network;

- African Americans should be given consideration for upcoming or existing vacancies; a potential vacancy for a City appointment was identified for immediate action;

- The Commission agreed to send all persons who signed the sign-in list a network application form; those who responded will have their names forwarded to each appointing authority

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and to the network chair for consideration as appointments occur;

- The legislation needs to be changed to allow community-based, ethic organizations to serve as appointing authorities.

We subsequently broke into discussion groups to address the following questions. One young adult group was formed and their answers are presented separately.

1. **What are the key elements of our vision for safe and healthy families?**

The Spokane community's vision focused on tangible and intangible elements:

Stable, comfortable income, and **affordable housing** were the two tangible elements considered to be building blocks for safe and healthy families.

Effective parenting received the greatest number of mentions and included ideas such as open communication, supervision and support of children, spending quality time with children , allowing for personal space and time and helping to instill in children a sense of self worth. Parental empowerment was an important aspect of effective parenting; many people felt that parents no longer had the authority or responsibility for their families and children.

A supportive community was another essential element of strong and healthy families; communities should include religious or spiritual involvement; systems to support the parenting process/experience, open communication and communities should be without fear.

- *Young Adults & Youth*

Key elements of their vision included love, understanding, community support, employment stability, medical care, parenting skills and positive male role models.

2. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been most effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

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Community centers and organized youth groups, family functions, evening programs and activities were among the services and programs considered the most successful.

East Central and Martin Luther King Community Centers were specifically mentioned. **Culturally responsive services** and services which provided individualized client/customer attention were considered the next most successful.

The following specific services were also identified on a broad basis: child care, drug treatment programs, mental health, financial assistance, health care, churches and schools.

- *Young Adults & Youth*

Young people identified the following services as most effective:

- Public health care,
- School employment although they noted these services did not serve all ethnic groups alike;
- High school peer tutoring and mentoring programs; and
- Church programs which promoted youth interaction and constructive activities.

Attitudes and behaviors which they felt contributed to safe and healthy families included quality family time; reading; parental monitoring of TV; respect; fighting fair; successful black couples; positive reinforcement; empowerment of children and families.

3. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been least effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

The list of ineffective elements was considerably larger than the list of things that worked. Three major themes were, however, evident:

- **Negative attitudes towards people of color** was a major theme. Groups identified lack of divers staff and curriculum in the school systems; lack of respect for people of color; negative media and press; lack of cultural awareness; stereotypes; and discriminatory practices as being major deterrents to the development of safe and health families.

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- A number of problems were also identified with respect to **service delivery systems.** Specifically: the lack of fund for all programs which generally resulting in inadequate planning, organizing and staffing for success; agencies distant from the real world and dedicated to addressing the needs and problems; and agencies that discourage clients.

- **The Police Department** was the one specific service agency identified as being ineffective;

Other issues and concerns included children who resist helping efforts; non- supportive parents; a lack of information on available programs and services; and a lack of unity of purpose and goals within communities.

- *Young Adults & Youth*

Services considered least effective included the media; stereotypes; negative attitudes; lack of reinforcement or negative support; some socials services which are not supportive; lack of understanding between abuse versus discipline; and no support at home.

4. Identify three action priorities for creating safe and healthy families?

Group priorities included programs that will:

- Increase educational opportunities for children and adults;
- Help provide or provide jobs with good pay and stable economic prognosis;
- Foster parent empowerment and responsibility;
- Promote economic independence;
- Unite the family unit;
- Develop a community support system; and
- Bring churches into the mainstream.

- *Young Adults & Youth*

The youth group recommended that action priorities should focus on:

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Establishing the support systems needed to build the family foundation via education, job stability, income stability and parenting skills needed to successfully raise a family.

Helping parents to be loving & supportive "in spite of" was their number one priority.

Community involvement was their third priority and considered essential to raising safe and healthy families.

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June 1, 1995
Tri-Cities
Columbia River Basin College
6 p.m. - 8 p.m.

Facilitator: Shani Taha
Commissioner & Network member: Norman Moorer
Commission Staff: James Kelly

Number of Participants: 10

Note: In the Fall of 1994, the Tri-Cities African American community conducted an African American Summit which drew over 150 participants. This summit was a community mobilization process which discussed and analyzed many of the same issues and established an agenda for community action. Because of the similarities between the two processes, the results of the Summit are used to outline the community's response to questions one and two. The discussion group which met on June 1st focused its time and energy on developing a response to questions three and four.

1. **What are the key elements of our vision for safe and healthy families?**

A family orientation, individual self esteem, spiritual values and commitment; active parental involvement in the development and education of children; organizational leadership which is in touch with their community and author effective solutions; a thriving business community and personal economic stability; priority on self-actualization; grounding in our history; a non-traditional approach to health care; activities/entertainment for youth; travel for youth; communication links.

Participants indicated our goal must be to insure our lives and those of our children.

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2. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been most effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

Only three agencies and programs were specifically identified as effective: Columbia Basin Minority Economic Development Association (CBMEDA), a local youth tutoring program and the Portland education model.

There was considerable discussion of characteristics of programs and services which were considered effective. Participants indicated that programs and services should:

- promote high self esteem
- develop awareness of cultural/historical roots and contributions
- reinforce the family
- instill the love of learning & develop critical learning skills
- promote self actualization
- expand youth horizons and travel opportunities
- provide for the rehabilitation of poor communities i.e. urban renewal
- promote business development

Participants also indicated that effective programs and services hold leaders accountable and establish common goals.

3. **What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and policies have been least effective/successful in helping to create safe and healthy families?**

Service organizations which are considered ineffective include:

- **The Justice system** - Participants indicated that disproportionality; the emphasis on detention rather than prevention and intervention; and laws and regulations which have reduced parental authority and have not allowed parents to discipline their children in a traditional manner, are major problems.

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- **The Schools** - participants observed that the educational system does not promote the self-esteem of African American children; don't teach our children; that education is poor both a teacher and curriculum problem; that administrations are not responsive to our children's needs and appear to want them to fail.

- **Economic Development** - it was noted that there are few black businesses in the Tri-Cities area and that the chambers "don't work for us". As a result, black children don't get employed by the private sector and few juvenile employment opportunities are available through State facilities and government contracts or the PIC. Apprenticeship programs were also viewed as ineffective because training and job opportunities are not available to African Americans.

- **Parental leadership & guidance** - participated indicated that families are stretched and working too hard; if they not working they are on welfare or ADC and do not receive guidance on how to use welfare systems to help them become self-supporting. Participants noted there was a lack of information on what's available to help families with children.

- **Foster parenting** - participants pointed out there was a lack of culturally relevant placements and group homes

- **Churches** --- participants indicated there are too many churches in the area which keeps the community separated into groups and without common goals and objectives. They also indicated that the churches weren't doing the right things and needed to be more aggressive in meeting the social services and family support needs of the community.

Community attitudes which were considered ineffective were:

- attitudes which discount and discredit good work within our community
- organizations which have not worked to transition leadership

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4. **Identify three action priorities for creating safe and healthy families?**

The following priorities were identified by community residents:

- **The development of a safe haven** - participants noted that community youth need a place to go that is open on a 24 hour basis and provides crisis services, non-crisis services and activities and an ombudsman who can intercede on the child's behalf to assure assistance and support. Also integral to the concept of a safe-haven was providing culturally appropriate foster care placement for African American children.

- **Change the educational system's core curriculum** - participants observed that a core curriculum which held high expectations for our children's performance and which integrated the history, accomplishments and contributions of African Americans was essential to building self-esteem and providing our children with positive direction and goals. Participants supported a local tutoring program as an effective alternative education effort.

- **Strengthen the family unit** - participants also agreed that programs and services needed to promote, support and reinforce the family. They indicated that families needed help to understand the importance of their role in supporting the children, the importance of parent participation and help in developing effective parenting skills.

In addition, participants recommended cultural/heritage programs which helped African Americans understand our history and contributions and connect with Africa; programs which would increase the number of jobs and training opportunities for youth and prison population; and programs which would help non-traditional, community-based agencies in competing effectively against larger for traditional agencies and programs.

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ATTACHMENT A

Sample Community Meeting Agenda

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Washington State Commission
on
African-American Affairs

Community Outreach Meetings On Black Families & Children

AGENDA

1. Welcome & Introduction of Network Members &
   Commissioners   7:00

2. Meeting Goals & Purposes   7:05

3. Network Purposes & Goals   7:10

4. Questions   7:15

5. Break Into Small Groups & Answer the Following 7:25
   Questions:

   - *What are the key elements of our vision for safe and
     healthy families?* (10 minutes)

   - *What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and
     policies have been most effective/successful in
     helping to create safe and healthy families?* (15
     minutes)

   - *What services, programs, attitudes, behaviors and
     policies have been least effective or have served as
     barriers to safe and healthy families?* (15 minutes)

   - *Identify three action priorities for creating safe and
     healthy families?* (10 minutes)

6. Small Groups Report Back (5 minutes per group) 8:30

7. Ways to Influence Network Planning & Funding 8:50
   Decisions

8. Closure & Next Steps   8:55

ATTACHMENT B

Community Meeting Flyer and Press Releases

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AN INVITATION TO THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

STATE African-American Affairs Commission to conduct meetings on the future of Black families & children

We particularly urge our young adults and "unsung" community leaders to attend these meetings....
- James Kelly, Exec. Director

Working in conjunction with local Public & Health Safety planning networks, the Washington State African-American Affairs Commission has scheduled seven community meetings to help identify the services and policies which have positively and negatively affected the health and safety of Black families and children.

The priorities we identify will help guide the allocation of State funds to local communities....
- TJ Vassar, Commission Chair

Local planning networks have been charged with making a measurable impact on a range of very serious problems: teen suicide; teen pregnancy; youth substance abuse; youth violence; youth out-of-home placements. State funds will be allocated based on network planning decisions and priorities.

African-American participation in network planning processes is important. These community meetings will help to document our concerns and link local leaders with network members.

We particularly want to hear from our young adults and our many "informal" leaders who dedicate their time to our youth but aren't involved in traditional government planning processes.

You 'll be able to express your ideas directly to the members of the Commission and the members of your local Public & Health Safety network.

Please help us get the word out. Post this invitation. Include it in local newsletters. Tell you staff, co-workers and parishioners. Ask your friends and neighbors to join you at this very important community meeting.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR

African-American Community Meeting Schedule

May 18	Yakima Southeast Community Center 1211 South 7th, Yakima	7 p.m.
May 19	Pierce Evergreen Tacoma Campus 1210 MLK Way So., Tacoma	7 p.m.
May 24	Thurston New Life Baptist Church 618 North Puget, Olympia	7 p.m.
May 25	King Garfield Community Center 2323 East Cherry, Seattle	7 p.m.
May 30	Kitsap Jane Ruhley Community Center 1302 Lafayette No., Bremerton	7 p.m.
May 31	Spokane East Central Community Center 500 South Stone, Spokane	7 p.m.
June 1	Tri-Cities Columbia Basin College HUB 2600 North 20th Ave., Pasco	6 p.m.

OUR CHILDREN NEED YOUR HELP NOW !

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: APRIL 3, 1995

Contact: James Kelly, 360-753-0127

Shani Taha, 206-723-7018

THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN COMMISSION REACHES OUT TO LOCAL CHILDREN & FAMILY SERVICES NETWORKS

In the 93-94 legislative session, a bill was passed which called for establishing community-based planning networks throughout the state. The networks are comprised of local residents appointed by counties, cities, school districts, chambers and others. They are charged with making a measurable impact on:

- youth violence

- teen suicide rates

- teen pregnancy

- out-of-home placements

- teen substance abuse

- school drop-outs

- child abuse or neglect

- domestic violence

Over the past year, each county has developed its own approach to this mandate. In King County, 7 independent networks have convened. Spokane, Thurston and Kistap have one regional network each. Pierce County formed two - one for Tacoma and one for greater Pierce.

To help assure that the voice of the African-American community is not lost or disadvantaged in this complex planning process, the Washington State Commission on African American Affairs launched an outreach project which targets seven counties with significant black populations.

"Our goals are several," said James Kelly, Executive Director to the Commission. "In our seven targeted communities,

approximately 28 of 300 network members are African American. We want them to know they are not alone. Working together, we can encourage broader African-American participation in network planning processes. We also plan to conduct seven outreach meetings in May. Many in our community cannot volunteer the time needed to influence network decisions. People will come out to one meeting and we will use what they tell us to help assure that service delivery decisions reflect our needs and priorities."

"We're particularly interested in reaching folks who have been informal, neighborhood leaders but who may not be tied to established community or government programs. " said Commission Chair TJ Vassar. 'We need new thinking if we're really going to make a difference. We also want to reach our young people. Our youth are closer to these problems and can provide us with valuable insight into what works and what hasn't worked."

Network plans must be completed and submitted to the state by next June. The recommendations and priorities in these plans will guide the allocation of state funds. If after several years, no measurable impact in these problems are seen, funds will be withheld from local communities.

Jennifer Roseman, Spokane's representative to the Commission indicated, "The networks will be making decisions which will affect our children and families. The African American community cannot afford to ignore their activities."

For further information on the Networks or if you want to attend our local outreach meetings, please call, 360-753-0127.